

**NIST, NACLA Sign Agreement,
Aim for Smoother, Simpler Laboratory Accreditation System**

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TORONTO -- A milestone in the development of a national system for laboratory accreditation was reached today with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, an agency of the Commerce Department's Technology Administration.

Under the MOU, the organizations aim to coordinate the more than 100 private-sector and government programs that assess and accredit testing and calibration laboratories in the United States. Lack of a coordinating mechanism has led to unnecessary duplication and sometimes contradictory accreditation standards and requirements, resulting in inefficiencies that can disadvantage U.S. exporters and other businesses and organizations that rely on the services of accredited laboratories.

The agreement was signed during a NACLA board meeting held in advance of the annual symposium of the National Conference of Standards Laboratories, a 1,550-member organization focused on the testing and calibration needs of industry and government and on issues in measurement science. During the weeks-long public comment period that preceded today's signing, NCSL was among 16 associations, businesses and government agencies that endorsed the goals of the MOU. The agreement, NCSL wrote, "will enhance acceptance of accredited laboratories and promote trade within the United States and to other countries."

Richard Kayser, Director of NIST's Technology Services, signed the MOU on behalf of NIST. In 1995, Congress charged NIST with coordinating federal, state and local conformity assessment activities. NACLA President Donald Heirman, former manager of Lucent Technologies Global Product Compliance Laboratory, represented NACLA. NACLA is a private-sector, nonprofit organization, formed in 1998 to foster "development of a system for recognizing the competence of testing and calibration laboratories, and worldwide acceptance of their test and calibration reports."

Terms of the MOU call for NIST to encourage government agencies to use NACLA-recognized accreditation bodies and to encourage laboratory accreditors to seek NACLA recognition. In addition, NIST will treat NACLA recognition as a suitable alternative to its own laboratory-accreditor recognition program, which NIST established to support its role as a designating authority under international, government-to-government trade agreements, such as the U.S.-European Union Mutual Recognition Agreement that covers six categories of products and is progressing toward implementation. NIST will monitor the NACLA program to ensure that it meets provisions in the MOU for recognizing

accreditors of competent testing and calibration laboratories, and that NACLA addresses the special laboratory accreditation requirements of government agencies, both domestic and foreign.

For its part, NACLA commits to fulfilling its mission to recognize competent laboratory accreditation organizations and to support U.S. trade agreements by assessing the competence of laboratory accreditors in accordance with the specific technical requirements of those agreements. NACLA also will take steps to promote broad use of NACLA-recognized accreditors and to encourage laboratory accreditation bodies to seek NACLA recognition.

The NIST-NACLA MOU was proposed by NIST in the Federal Register of May 19, 2000. Comments on the proposal were solicited and a public hearing was held at NIST's Gaithersburg, Md., headquarters on June 23, 2000. Public feedback was overwhelmingly supportive.

Details of the agreement are summarized in a fact sheet available on the NIST web site at www.nist.gov/public_affairs/factsheet/mou.htm. The full text of the MOU and its appendices can be found on the NIST web page, at <http://ts.nist.gov/>.

As a non-regulatory agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Technology Administration, NIST strengthens the U.S. economy and improves the quality of life by working with industry to develop and apply technology, measurements and standards through four partnerships: the Baldrige National Quality Program, the Measurement and Standards Laboratories, the Advanced Technology Program and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership.